

Testimony
Connecticut General Assembly
Veterans' Affairs Committee

by
Rosendo Garza Jr.
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**H.B. 6370 AN ACT CONCERNING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A TASK FORCE TO
EXAMINE THE CREATION OF A VETERANS TREATMENT PILOT PROGRAM.**

Senator Flexer, Representative Hennessy, distinguished members of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer this written testimony supporting H.B. 6370 An Act Concerning the Establishment of a Task Force to Examine the Creation of a Veterans Treatment Pilot Program whose purpose is to examine how to help veterans who run afoul of the law through the creation of a veterans treatment court ("VTC"). As a veteran with nearly 13 years of service, 10 of which were on active duty as an infantry officer with the United States Marine Corps, I firmly believe that this bill is a positive step towards ascertaining whether this legislature can do more to help Connecticut veterans who need the most help.¹

According to Justice for Vets, a non-profit organization whose mission is to "enable the creation of a nationwide network of Veterans Treatment Courts that is transforming the way veterans are handled in the criminal justice system,"² there are 184 VTCs in the United States.³ By tallying up the number of States with at least one VTC shown on the Justice for Vets map, one finds that the legislatures of 72 percent of the States (36 out of 50) created VTCs.⁴ This number is significant as it indicates that a large majority of the States have found the necessity to institute a VTC to help veterans who, as a consequence of a service connected issue, violate the law.

To be sure, Connecticut provides help to its veterans when they commit criminal transgressions. However, the proliferation of VTCs across the country begs the question: is it enough? A very timely article published by the Connecticut Health Investigative Team provides

¹ In an effort of full disclosure, I authored a paper discussing the need for a veterans treatment court in Connecticut. Rosendo Garza Jr., Note, *"The Soldier Bears the Deepest Wounds and Scars of War": Mobilizing Connecticut to Implement a Veterans Treatment Court*, 46 Conn. L. Rev. 1937 (2014).

² *About Us*, Justice for Vets, <http://justiceforvets.org/about> (last visited Feb. 16, 2015).

³ See *Veterans Treatment Court Locations*, Justice for Vets, <http://justiceforvets.org/about> (last visited Feb. 16, 2015) (depicting, by state, a map with the number of veterans treatment courts in the United States).

⁴ *Id.*

that two programs, one administered by the Veterans Health Administration and the other by the Department of Mental Health and Addition Services, “connect arrested veterans to treatment – rather than jail – [and Veterans] report that many are getting their lives back on track.”⁵ As a Marine officer and a combat veteran, I commend these results. Unfortunately, the article does not explore whether Connecticut can do more in light of the numerous VTCs across the country.

As nearly three quarter of the States have found, VTCs are a great benefit to veterans for many reasons.⁶ House Bill 6370 merely asks for Connecticut to perform its due diligence on whether the current system could do more for its veterans. A task force would not only look at the hard data to assess the measure of effectiveness of the current practice, but also could find new methods that would better help veterans. As 184 other jurisdictions have found, VTCs provide exceptional results.⁷

In closing, I urge this committee to favorably vote in favor of H.B. 6370. Connecticut treats its veterans well. However, this bill, with a minimal economic impact,⁸ would look closely and diligently to whether Connecticut can further aid veterans who, as a consequence of their service, committed a criminal violation. Thank you.



Rosendo Garza Jr.

⁵ Peggy McCarthy, *Troubled Veterans Get Treatment, Not Jail*, Conn. Health Investigative Team, (Feb. 15, 2015), <http://c-hit.org/2015/02/15/troubled-veterans-get-treatment-not-jail/>.

⁶ See, e.g., Anne Caron, Minn. Judicial Branch, Fourth Judicial District, *Veterans Court—Two Year Review: July 2010—June 2012*, at 3–4 (2013), available at http://www.justiceforvets.org/sites/default/files/gallery/Fourth%20Judicial%20District%20Veterans%20Court_Two%20Year%20Review_July2010-June2012%20-%20Copy.pdf (summarizing statistical findings quantifying the benefits and results of a VTC in Minnesota).

⁷ See, e.g., Donna Brown, Op-Ed., *Veterans Treatment Courts a Step Forward*, Bangor Daily News (Mar. 26, 2012), <http://bangordailynews.com/2012/03/26/opinion/contributors/veterans-treatment-courts-a-step-forward/> (stating that, as of 2012, the Buffalo Veterans Treatment Court had a recidivism rate of zero).

⁸ See *Fiscal Note for File Copy 354*, Office of Fiscal Analysis of the Conn. Gen. Assembly, available at <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2013/FN/2013HB-05387-R000354-FN.htm> (last visited Feb. 16, 2015) (providing that the fiscal impact of H.B. 5387 An Act Establishing a Task Force to Study the Use of Military Occupational Specialty Training as a Substitute for State Licensing Requirements “may be a cost of less than \$1,000 in FY 14 to agencies participating in the task force”).